

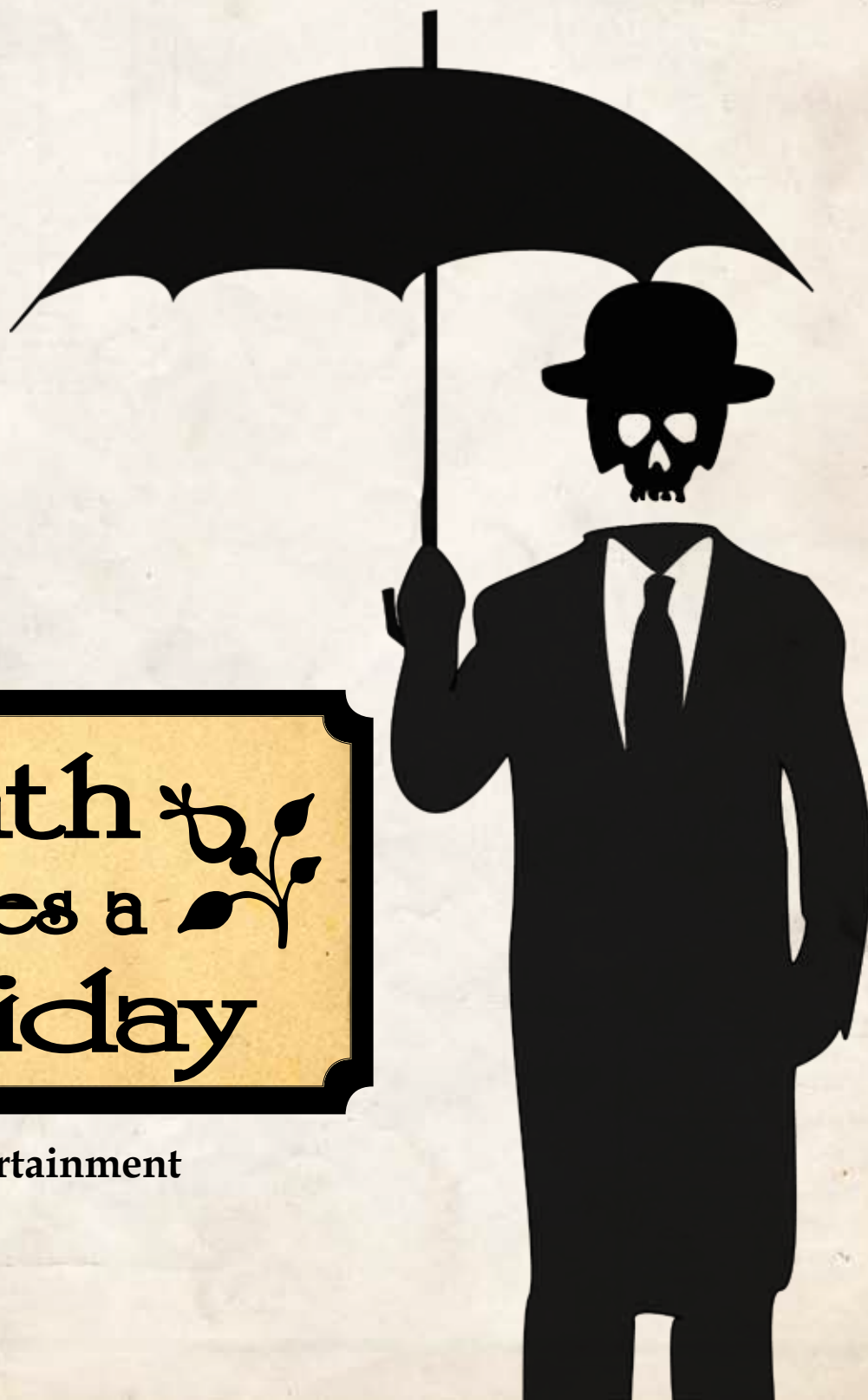
"When you have to kill a man,  
it costs nothing to be polite."

*-Winston Churchill*

*Wish you  
were here*

# Death Takes a Holiday

A Narrative Entertainment  
by Nick Wedig



# Death Takes A Holiday

A light-hearted narrative phantasy  
Concerning the grimmest of topics  
For two or more participants

By Nicholas Wedig  
*Teapot Dome Games, Ltd.*



The firm of Boxmuller and Sons had never been accurately named. The deceased proprietor, Hopewell Boxmuller<sup>1</sup>, had no sons. He simply liked the sound of the name. More pleased by the linguistic trick than by his solitary nature, Hopewell dubbed his business venture in a manner ill-befitting his childless state. Thus it was that, when the old eccentric died, the property passed into the joint custody of a variety of greatnieces, second cousins and his half-sister's stepchildren. The inheritance laws of Perdido Island are notoriously byzantine, so such displays of inheritance law are by no means unusual. What was noteworthy were the experiences of these relatives as they voyaged to inspect their newfound estates on Perdido Island following great uncle Hopewell's demise.

## The facts were these:

Having chosen to eschew waiting for the daily ferry from the mainland, the family rented the “*Memento Murray*”, a small sailboat from one Maurice Kandes, a local fisherman. As the clan of mourning relatives set sail, Perdido Island was seeing extremely low tides, due to a solar eclipse one quarter of the way around the planet. Fate seemed to turn against our protagonists when the sailboat, captained and crewed by a family of amateurs, ran its hull up against the newly exposed mast of the **HMS Caliban**, which had sunk three and a half centuries prior. The ancient schooner's mast pierced the hull of the rented vessel, and the Memento Murray sank on top of the older shipwreck.

---

<sup>1</sup> Myocardial ischaemia

There were no survivors.

And yet, the deaths of the Boxmuller relatives is not the end of the story. The premature demise of the unskilled mariners is just the beginning of an even stranger tale.

Upon their demise, the Boxmuller family found themselves in the Bone Orchard, as most souls do once their earthly existence has been terminated. The Bone Orchard is the abode of the anthropomorphic personification of Death. Once He has collected a soul from its dying body, the Grim Reaper (as He is colloquially called) guides the lost soul into the Bone Orchard, and there to the Vale of Souls.

As He led them toward the black swirling miasma of the Vale of Souls, the Grim Reaper paused for a moment. With a hesitation that implied uncertainty, the embodiment of mortality made a proposition to the Boxmuller relatives.

The End of All Things, you see, had diligently been working with no respite the past several millenia. He was becoming weary of His traditional task. He wanted to take a break from ending the lives of mortals. The Grim Reaper wished to relax and, for just a short time, stop Reaping souls.

*In short, Death needed a holiday.*

And so it was that He made an offer to the mortal family whose souls He was shepherding. The Grim Reaper would return the family to their mortal lives and let them live once more. In exchange, the Boxmullers would act as substitute Reapers while Death was on holiday. In the moments just before a person died, the Boxmullers would go to the dying, stand by their side and touch their flesh. Then the soul would shuffle off its mortal coil and follow the ersatz Reaper back to the Vale of Souls. Once it passed through the Vale of Souls, the spirit would go on to whatever afterlife awaits. The Boxmullers would act as the substitute Deaths of Perdido Island.





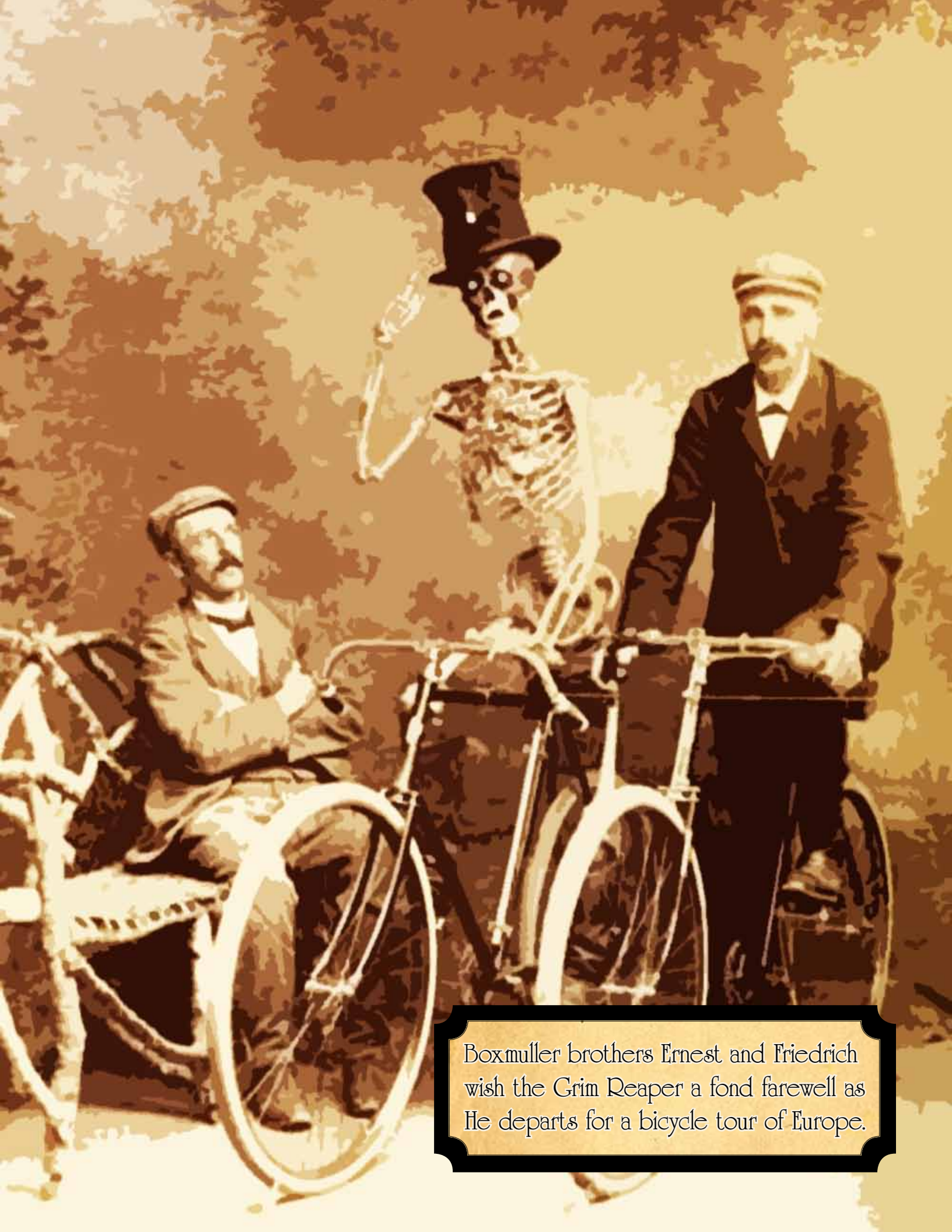
Perhaps dumbstruck by the metaphysical weight of their experiences, none of the Boxmuller clan thought to ask how long the Reaper's holiday would last. This was the first of their many mistakes.

The next thing that they new, the Boxmuller family found themselves washing up on the beach of Perdido Island. Their boat had crashed but, miraculously, each and every one had survived. A postcard sat on a nearby barrel, bearing a peculiar legend: "Try tailing Mrs. Sapsorrow for the afternoon. Yours, Mr. D."

This postcard would prove to be the first of many from the Grim Reaper to the family. Each subsequent card would be more cryptic than the last. But each card would also lead by a circuitous and improbable path to a dying person.








Boxmuller brothers Ernest and Friedrich  
wish the Grim Reaper a fond farewell as  
He departs for a bicycle tour of Europe.

# Welcome, Narrators!

 *Death Takes A Holiday* is a collaborative story-telling entertainment. It is intended to be played by a small coterie of friends and acquaintances, ideally three to six in number. You will each portray a unique **Primary Character** (PC), stating and perhaps acting out the actions of your PC. Collectively you will all collaborate to portray the **minor characters** (NPCs) and establishing the setting and other details. As a group, you will work together to improvise a story about life and death and cosmic forces and regular human lives. This story will be created by you and your friends within some constraints, by following the rules that follow.

*Death Takes A Holiday* can be played in a single sitting, much like a movie, or it can be played as a series of interconnected sessions, like how episodes of a television series connect into a television series. Make sure you discuss with your fellow players whether the game you're playing will be a single session or the start of a longer series of sessions. If you do intend to keep playing for more sessions, talk about how long you'd like the series to last. Of course, you can always collectively change your minds and make a one-shot game into the start of a series (like a TV movie being spun off into an ongoing show) or cut short a series if it has passed a natural endpoint.


At the beginning of your first time playing, the group will need to customize Perdido Island and each create your initial Primary Characters: members of the sprawling, extended family of the Boxmuller clan.








You create your PCs and the setting by doing what is called "consulting the oracles". Players also consult the oracles for many other tasks in the game. To consult the oracles, do this: ask a question, then draw a card from the Tarot like deck of cards used in the game. Ask one of your fellow players to interpret the card, as you would with a Tarot card foretelling the future of the PCs. Then ask a different player to offer a different interpretation of the same card. Choose one of these interpretations to be the true one.





# Your Job as a Player

 *Death Takes a Holiday* has no centralized authority figure, it is incumbent upon each participant to see that certain tasks are completed. These tasks include (but are not limited to) the following:

-  Watch for places where an authority should be invoked, call for it as needed.
-  Act as the oracle by interpreting a card when the authority player calls on you to do so.
-  Roleplay your character. Describe their actions, thoughts and speech and act them out. Try to help the character succeed at their goals but also...
-  Introduce problems and curveballs for the PCs, including your own PC. It is fun to see your PCs face obstacles and sometimes fail.
-  Roleplay minor characters as needed, especially if your PC is not present in the current scene.
-  Add background details and flavor to scenes, whether or not your PC is not present.
-  Make the experience as entertaining as possible for your fellow players. Try to steer the story toward subjects and scenes that you know will please your fellow players and away from those that they find boring or uncomfortable.

Be at the corner of Fifth and  
Wolverstone at half-past four.  
Though the weather will be  
sunny, make sure you bring your  
umbrella.

-The Oncoming Storm



# Consulting the Oracles

Many times the rules herein will ask you to “consult the oracles”. Most commonly, you will be asked to consult the oracles by the authority cards. You will also be asked to consult the oracles when creating and updating the characters and setting of your story.

Consulting the oracles is a ritualized process that works thusly: Ask a question about what may happen. Sometimes this question will be predetermined, other times it will be of your own devising. Then draw a card from the Tarot deck and show it to your compatriots. Ask one stout collaborator to explain how the card symbolizes or augurs the answer to your question, in much the same way that a Tarot card purportedly foretells a supplicant’s future. Once your friend has finished explaining the card’s meaning in this situation, ask another player to offer a different interpretation of the card. This second version of events may be entirely different, or it may be identical except in one key detail. It does not matter. Once you have heard two interpretations, choose one to be the truth and one to be sadly mistaken. Give your Authority marker to the person whose interpretation you chose. They will make the next decision regarding that aspect of the game.


It is good form to ask for interpretations from those players that are more reserved or feeling left out of the storyline as it currently is going. This way, those players that have been sidelined can still offer their own creative inputs into the game.







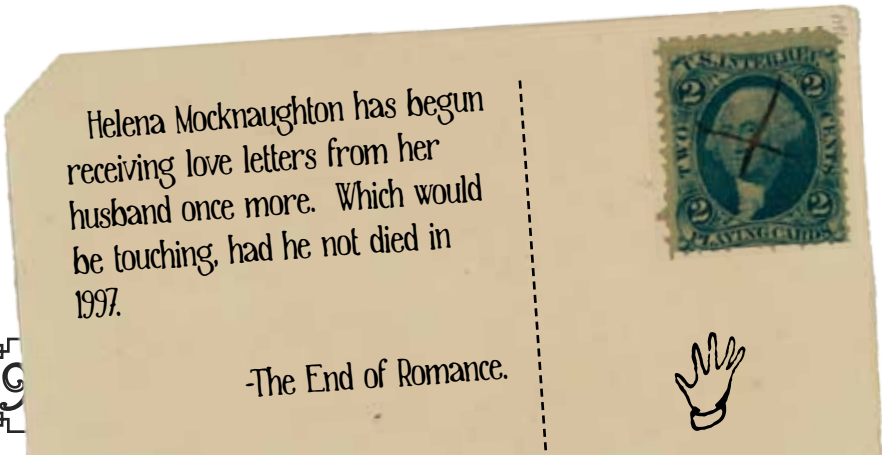
# Authorities and Scenes

hile playing, there are three 'authorities'. These determine who draws a Tarot card and asks for interpretations and when it is appropriate to do so. Choose three players to start with these authorities. It doesn't matter much which players start with them, because they will move around to various players fairly frequently. Similarly, it is perfectly fine for a player to hold two or more authorities at a time, as they will give one or more of those away within a scene.

When the time is right, the holder of an authority will consult the oracles. The authority holder may, if they choose, ask a question about the scene that directs the interpretations in some direction. When you hear the two alternative interpretations of the card, choose the more interesting result (which may or may not benefit your character). Give the authority to the player who offered the interpretation that you preferred.

The main body of a session consists of a series of scenes. Two authorities relate to the structure of a scene. The holder of the Openings authority will decide how the scene opens. Then, at some key moment, another player will invoke the Twists authority to throw something unexpected into the scene. When this happens, you again consult the oracle and so forth. After the Twist, the group should look for an elegant moment at which to end the scene. (You are best served to end a scene early, and potentially to return to the scene later if needed.)

A third authority covers matters about death, Death and the unnatural. Unlike the other two, the Death authority may not be invoked every scene. Or it might be invoked several times in a specific scene.



Helena Mocknaughton has begun receiving love letters from her husband once more. Which would be touching, had he not died in 1997.

-The End of Romance.



# Example

It is the beginning of play. Anya, Blake, Christine and Davoud have just completed their characters and customizing their version of Perdido Island. Anya holds the Openings authority, so she gets to decide how the scene starts. Anya asks “So we have all just miraculously survived a deadly shipwreck by being conscripted by the Grim Reaper himself. What is the first thing that we do after washing up on the beaches of Perdido Island?” Anya then draws from the deck “*Chains - To be unable to act when necessary.*” Anya asks Blake to interpret the card.

Blake offers this opening for a scene: “Okay, so we’re crawling up from the wreckage of the boat, covered in maritime muck. A raven flutters down with a postcard from death which ‘*You should hurry. Your first termination will be in the Perdido Island Birdwatcher’s society in twenty two minutes.*’ But Quigley has his foot trapped under a bit of shipwreck and we can’t get there in time.”

Anya briefly considers this, then asks Davoud for a different interpretation of the card. Davoud has a different take on the card. “We are crawling up from the sea and the raven delivers a postcard, just as Blake said. Permelia and Quigley quickly rush off, but Rupesh and Sobriquet get corralled by the bumbling local sheriff and have to explain exactly what happened. We’re stuck on the beach while you escape.”

Anya immediately starts thinking about how that scene can go wrong for the PCs. “Oh!” she says. “And the sheriff could find the postcard and think we’re up to something.”

Anya decides that is the scene that they’ll have. She gives the Openings authority to Davoud. Then she begins to roleplay the sheriff NPC badgering the PCs, while Davoud and Christine play their PCs enduring this interrogation. Whenever the scene reaches a big climax or a lull in action, somebody will invoke the Twists authority to get it moving again.



The Italians have a saying:  
“When the game is over, the  
king and the pawn go in the  
same box.”
















# Genesis

**B**efore you begin play, everyone as a group will need to customize the setting of Perdido Island and to create your starting PCs, the members of the sprawling Boxmuller clan. You will do this as a collective, by taking turns consulting the oracles to answer the following questions. Go around the group, each choosing one question and then drawing a card from the deck and consulting the oracles to divine the answer. For groups of three players, you'll want to go four times around the table asking questions. For four players, go three times. For groups of five or more, you'll want to only make two rounds around the table asking questions.

If you have an idea for what you want your character to be like, then it is good form to mention these ideas to your fellow storytellers before you begin asking questions. It is not necessary to have a fully formed mental image of your character, and indeed it is probably better to not have everything nailed down just yet. The process of consulting the oracles will surprise you, leading to characters you would not have created of your own imagination.

It is fine to repeat questions other players already asked (though you shouldn't repeat questions that you yourself already asked). It's also not a problem if some questions go unanswered.

-  **Why do people come to Perdido Island?**
-  **In what way does Perdido Island seem to be a collision of past and present?**
-  **What improbable local business did uncle Hopewell leave you all in his will?**
-  **How do you get to and from the Bone Orchard, Death's otherworldly abode?**
-  **What do I want and why can't I have it?**
-  **What do I owe your character? Why?**
-  **What do I fear most?**
-  **What unusual capability or skill do I possess?**
-  **What is my relationship with your Boxmuller like?**
-  **Why is there bad blood between our two PCs?**
-  **What do I regret about my past?**
-  **What moral or ethical line do I refuse to cross?**
-  **What happy memories do I have of visiting Perdido Island as a child?**

Many comedians talk about  
dying onstage, but only a  
few actually do so.

-Your Worst Critic



# Example

Anya, Blake, Christine and Davoud sit down to play a game of Death Takes a Holiday. Because they have four players, each will choose three questions and consult the oracles for the answers.

Anya begins by saying "I don't know anything about my PC except that I want her name to be Permelia." She looks over the questions and chooses "What is my relationship with your Boxmuller like?" Anya then draws a card from the deck and receives "The Stray Dog - To remain fiercely loyal in the face of adversity." Anya points to Davoud to answer the question. He suggests his Boxmuller is Anya's older brother, who always was looking out for her when growing up. Anya doesn't feel like her Boxmuller needs anyone to protect her, though. She turns to Christine and asks for an alternative interpretation. Christine suggests that her character is an outsider that married into the Boxmuller clan, and she is married to Anya's PC. "Were we going to be a married gay couple, or did you want to play a man?" Anya asks. "I could play a male PC, if you prefer... maybe an immigrant from a Hindu family named, let's see... Rupesh Krishnaswami. He came to America as a student, met Permelia, fell in love and married her." Anya likes this scenario and chooses Christine's version over Davoud's. Anya's PC thus becomes Permelia Boxmuller-Krishnaswami.

Then it is the next player, Blake's turn, to choose a question and consult the oracles. The process continues until each primary character has been fleshed out some.





Time waits for no man, but the  
clocktower of St. Albans might  
stop for a certain young lady.

-Time's Arrow Points to Me



# Substitute Reapers

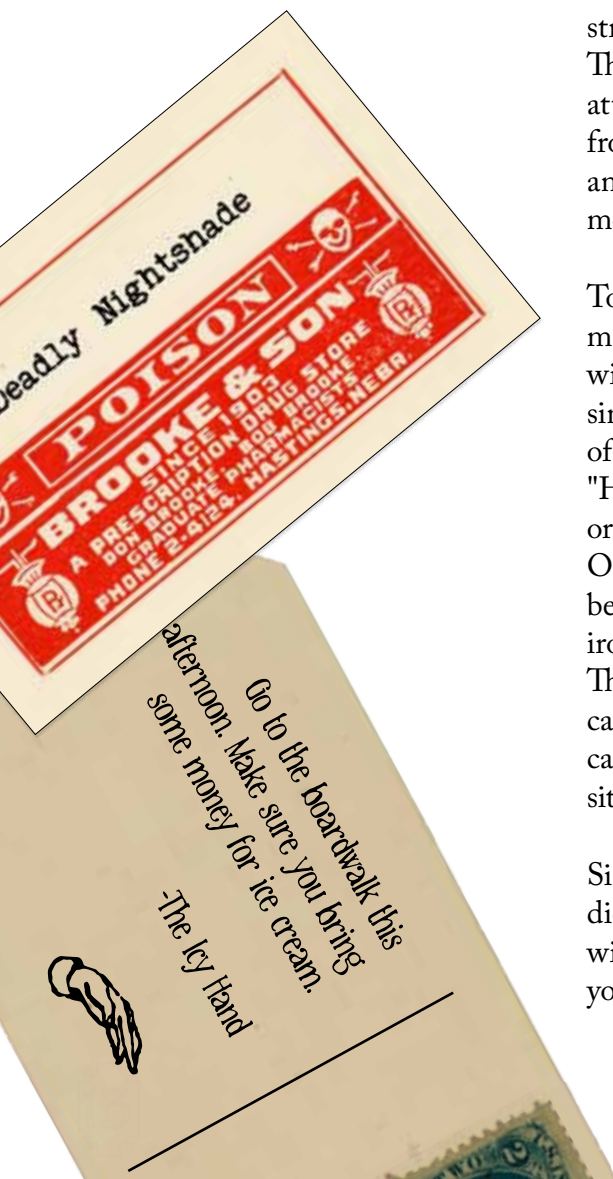
These cards arrive via mysterious means to wherever the Boxmullers happen to be, not via the mundane postal system. 

eath has set up a simple system for handling His absence. Every day or so, the Grim Reaper would send the Boxmullers a postcard. Each postcard would be emblazoned with a cryptic clue as to who was about to die. If the Boxmullers follow the clues provided, they eventually arrive at a person who was about to die. The route to the dying person, though, is usually a twisty series of improbable coincidences and unlikely occurrences. Only rarely is anyone mentioned on the postcard the target of the Reaping. More often, finding the person mentioned on the postcard leads the Boxmuller into a deeper adventure, eventually finding the doomed individual.

It is generally assumed that the Grim Reaper chose such a strange, unwieldy method of operation for a specific purpose. The best guess is that Death did not want the Boxmullers attempting to manipulate or alter people's destinies or to profit from their mystical foreknowledge. But as the Grim Reaper is an anthropomorphic personification instead of a human being, His motives are hard to discern at best.

To aid in their work, Death granted the Boxmullers some magical abilities. One is the ability to identify how an individual will die merely by looking at them. The ability only conveys a single, brief detail of a specific word or phrase. Often the cause of death will be indirect or non-obvious: a cause of death like "Holes" might refer to a sinkhole in the ground that they fall into, or it might refer to the strain of digging a hole causing a stroke. Or it might be a bullet hole, perhaps in their skull. Or it could be a misaligned hole in a piece of machinery causing a one-ton iron wheel to go rolling off course and over our hapless subject. The causes of death are ambiguous enough so that you the players can surprise each other with how they apply, and also so that you can apply creativity to make sure the cause is applicable to the situation at hand.

Similarly, it is rarely clear from the postcard who is going to die. So you can always have a different NPC arrive on the scene with a more clear cause of death, if you have otherwise narrated yourselves into a corner.



# The Art of Reaping



The removing of souls from the soon-to-be-deceased is a simple affair. The Reaper simply needs to approach the subject and briefly touch them some time in the last few minutes of life. All the about-to-die notices is a slight chill run down their spine, as their immortal spirit separates from their mortal form. Once released from the body, the soul is free to follow after the Reaper back to the Bone Orchard.



Subsequent to their death, the deceased haunt the Reaper as a ghost, following them everywhere, until they are brought to Vale of Souls. Once they enter the swirling maelstrom of psychic energies, the spirit passes on to whatever afterlife awaits them. Despite their curiosity, the Grim Reaper chose not to reveal the secrets of the universe to the Boxmullers beyond those necessary to do His job. Revealing cosmic secrets is not really His department, you see.

Canny readers may begin to wonder about the parameters of this exercise. "What happens if the Reaper chooses not to Reap" they ask, along with a variety of other questions. Assuming the death occurs as preordained, then the individual dies but their animating life force remains inside the body. These unfortunate individuals remain dead but active, as one of the un-dead. Undead beings come back in a variety of forms, from shambling reanimated corpses to intangible ghostlike creatures to stranger things still. Similarly, the pain of their death tends to warp the personalities of the deceased.

When a character dies without a proper Reaping, you as players should consult the oracles to answer the following questions about their undead state. Beginning with the player with the Death authority, take turns asking questions until everyone has asked one. If you run out of questions and some players did not get to ask one, feel free to make up new ones until everyone has asked at least one question.

- ☞ **What visual or other clues identify them as undead?**
- ☞ **What unnatural, inhuman hungers do they have?**
- ☞ **What do they remember of their prior human life?**
- ☞ **How has dying stripped away their empathy and humanity?**



# Example

Substitute Reapers Permelia and Rupesh got lost on the way to the historical reenactment. Consequently, they have missed the opportunity to reap the soul of the falsely bearded Andreas Athanasiadis, who was playing the part of Town Elder #3. Mr. Athanasiadis choked on a historically inaccurate turkey leg while the Boxmuller family was still finding a place to park their motor vehicle.

Consequently, poor Andreas's still living soul was trapped in his unliving flesh. The players looked at each other. "So I guess he's undead now" says Davoud. "Let's look at the undead questionnaire." Somebody finds the appropriate sheet with the questions on it. Christine has the Death authority, so she picks her question first. Christine starts from the top: "What visual or other clues identify them as undead?". Christine turns over a card from the deck and gets "The Traitor - to deceive or betray." She first asks Blake to interpret the card. Blake says "The undead Mr. Athanasiadis doesn't look dead at all. In fact, he looks fully human. It's just that he can't talk because he has the turkey caught in his throat." Christine nods, then turns to Anya, who gives a differing suggestion: "Andreas is able to shift his form to look like anyone, but he starts smelling of rotting meat almost instantly." Christine prefers the first answer to the second, so they go with the human looking, eerily silent version of Mr. Athanasiadis.

Next around the table is Davoud, who picks "How has dying stripped away their empathy and humanity?". He turns over the card "The Merchant - to be tempted by financial gain or worldly pleasures." First, Christine answers "Mr. Athana... whatever his name is. Andreas can now only see things as transactional. Human life and well-being holds no interest to him. He just sees the flow of resources from one person to another." Davoud considers this, and then asks Anya for another option. She suggests "Andreas now doesn't care about anyone else. He desires everything for himself. Particularly food, which he can't eat, and valuable goods, which he'll hoard." Davoud gives the nod to the second option, because it gives a clearer picture of how the recently deceased will behave.

And so it goes on, with Anya and Blake consulting the oracles regarding the remaining questions, until the players have a good idea what the undead Town Elder #3 is like. Then the players can resume the scene and confront the newly created undead abomination.

Lighthouse tours will soon prove  
more dangerous than Mr. Manciple  
had anticipated.

-Unexpected yet Inevitable



The other way for a Reaper to interfere with the natural order is to prevent the death itself. By correctly deciphering Death's postcard ahead of time, a clever Reaper might be able to identify who is about to die and prevent that death. This may seem like an act of mercy, but it isn't. If a soul survives beyond the time of its preordained death, then another must die in their place, shortly thereafter. Even worse, you have performed no mercy to the person you saved. The soul can only survive for so long on this mortal plane of existence. Any soul left in contact with the earth for too long withers, until it is barely there at all. To outside observers, the person seems fine, but any ability to feel joy or love dwindles away until they become a cruel, spiteful and destructive individual. They will never again know happiness, and they will only bring pain and suffering to those around them.

The only way to free such a soul is to repeat the circumstances of their death. Recreating the cause of death intended to do the subject in will kill the living body and release the corrupted soul.



Taking in a  
Broadway show



Just like the song says, Father  
McKenzie is writing the words to a  
sermon that no one will hear.

Isn't that cute?

-Not Religious, Myself







# Causes of Death

17





# Growth and Change

Events change people and things. At the end of every session, everybody should discuss the characters and setting and what they enjoyed about the game. If you plan to play again, you should consider how the events of the game affect the people and their world. Then each take turns consulting the oracles to answer one of the following questions. Start with the player with the Twists authority. Keep each player has asked at least one question. If you run out of questions, just have the extra players ask any question they want (or choose a question that was already asked.)

- ☞ What did my PC learn from these events?
- ☞ How have these events left my PC scarred?
- ☞ How did we leave a mark on the world?
- ☞ Whose life did we impact and how?
- ☞ What loose plot thread will come back to haunt us?

If you want to highlight the changes to the world you made, you can choose to promote a minor character to primary character status. Thus, in future sessions you can choose to play with your initial Boxmuller or with your newly promoted character as your primary character. It is assumed that your alternative PCs will fade into the background for sessions where you aren't playing them as PCs, though you can bring them in as minor characters.

## Example

The players have just concluded an exciting tale involving the Cyclic Brotherhood, a vaguely Amish cult that believes time is a decade long loop. The players discuss what they liked and didn't about the session, and then get to seeing how they've changed the setting and the PCs. Blake has the Twists authority, so he goes first. He asks the players "What loose plot thread will come back to haunt us?" Blake also draws a card: "***The Substitute** - to act as a replacement for another / to fail to live up to the one you imitate.*" First Christine offers "Well, the leader of the Cyclic Brotherhood is dead. Somebody steps into power in the cult, using it for their own ends." Blake asks Davoud for an alternative, who offers "The Substitute actually refers to our PCs. The new leader of the Cyclic Brotherhood figured out that we had some power over life and death. Which the Brotherhood could use to make sure people die only when their equivalent died exactly a decade before." Blake definitely prefers the second, more detailed answer. So now the Cyclic Brotherhood will attempt to exploit the Reapers one way or the other.

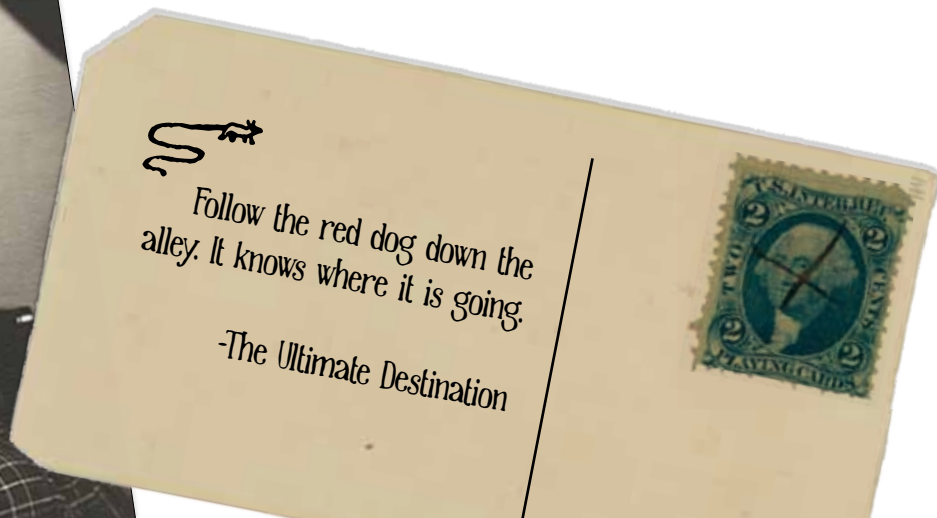
# Creating New PCs



You do not have to always play members of the Boxmuller family. After your first session, if you desire, you can upgrade a minor character into a primary character. In future sessions, you former PC(s) will be downgraded to minor characters that anyone can roleplay as needed. Meanwhile, you will have the exclusive right to roleplay the primary character that you have chosen for the session. At the start of each session, you can choose one character to take as your primary character (PC). This PC can change from session to session. It is assumed that the PCs not being played will be occupied elsewhere on Perdido Island or will generally fade into the background while the story focuses primarily on the PCs that you have chosen for that session. You can go back to your old PCs in future sessions if you change your mind.

When you upgrade a minor character to PC status for the first time, answer the following questions. Some of these may have already been revealed in the course of play. If they have, just make a note of the answer. If they have not been made clear already, consult the oracles for each unanswered question. If you have any additional questions about the character's personality, goals or background, you could consult the oracles about these matters now as well.

- ☞ **What do I want and why can't I have it?**
- ☞ **Why do the Boxmullers and I work together?**
- ☞ **How are my goals incompatible with the Boxmullers?**
- ☞ **What unusual abilities, skills or knowledge do I possess?**
- ☞ **What moral or ethical line do I refuse to cross?**

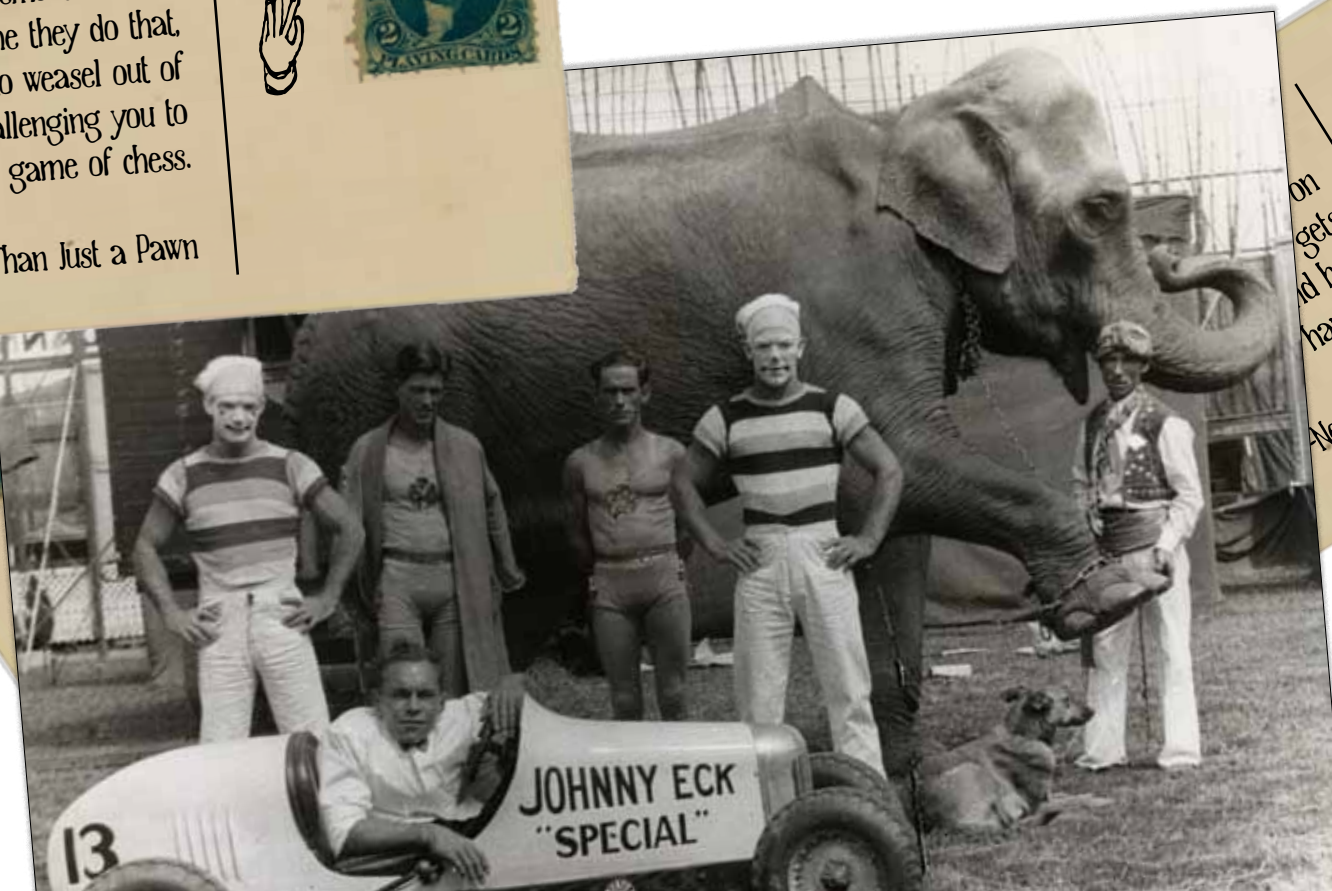


# Example

Blake has been playing Death Takes a Holiday with his friends, but his PC Quigley has never really been very interesting. During the second session, the group encountered a washed up science fiction author named **Darnell P. Longbellow**. Longbellow was suffering severe writer's block, and thus had come to Perdido Island seeking isolation and inspiration. But all he found was the bottom of a bottle of whiskey. Blake briefly roleplayed Longbellow and enjoyed how those scenes played out. He decides to retire Quigley for the moment. Blake looks over the questionnaire. The group already answered the first question: Longbellow seeks inspiration, but can't find it because he is constantly in a depressed and drunken stupor. Blake then immediately wonders about the second question, so he consults the oracles. "Why does Longbellow work with the Boxmullers?" he asks. The card drawn from the deck is "*Die By The Sword - To suffer the results of your past misdeeds / to harm oneself*". Anya answers "You feel guilty for how you treated us during the summoning ritual scene, and so you want to make amends." Blake then turns to Davoud, who suggests that the card means "Longbellow is dying of liver cancer, which is why he's depressed, why he's drinking and why he can't write. But he hopes that befriending a substitute Grim Reaper might delay or prevent his looming death." Blake decides that he prefers Davoud's answer, so he notes down that Longbellow is dying of cancer and seeking a cure.

They're showing "The Seventh Seal" at the cinema this week.  
Every time they do that,  
somebody tries to weasel out of  
their death by challenging you to  
a game of chess.

-More Than Just a Pawn







Mrs. Cecilia Snowflower has terminal lymphatic cancer. But that will not be today's cause of death.  
-A Scorpio

"Professor" Baldwin's leap from "The City of Quincy" is going get somebody killed. But it's not the "professor".

-The Final Flight



# HE JUMPS FROM THE CLOUDS!

Prof. T. S. Baldwin, the World-Famed Aeronaut, in His Leap From the Heights of Heaven, Shooting  
**TWO MILES THROUGH SPACE!**

HE DROPS  
LIKE  
A



**WILL  
HE  
KILL**

**METEOR. HIMSELF**

Ascending in his mammoth Silk Balloon, "City of Quincy," and grasping his frail gossamer with his hands, he will shoot to earth at the rate of  
**★ 1,000 FEET A MINUTE! ★**

One Man's Daring Awe the World! He Lives Years in a Moment!

BALL PARK MINN



ed.  
green





# Strange Threats

**P**erdido Island may prove to be an inhospitable new home to the Boxmuller family. Now that they are imbued with a magical power over death itself, other interested parties are likely to intervene in their affairs. Many such groups may have benevolent intentions, as with doctors trying to save sick patients or grieving family members trying to preserve a dying aunt. Most heartbreaking of all are the parents trying to prevent their children from dying. Use these sort of moral dilemmas to create difficult decisions and moral quandaries for the stand-in Reapers.

Other entities, though, wish to oppose the Boxmullers for selfish or malevolent reasons. The shadowy Tithonus Society's members wish to live forever so that they can gain complete control over society. The forest spirits enjoy playing with human lives, and manipulating their destinies. And the Widow's Walk Shipping Company is a front for a cabal of the undead, who desperately want to avoid whatever afterlife awaits them.

Boxmullers become more familiar with their newfound role as temporary psychopomp, then you may need to cast about for a different source of conflict in order to keep the story entertaining. If you feel that the game has been losing tension or could use some additional interaction, then you should introduce one of the antagonists and threats appearing in the following pages. Or create your own antagonist who will trouble the Primary Characters as they go about their lives.

It is good form to suggest a threat at the beginning of a game session. If you wish to bring a threat into play in the middle of a game session, then you may want to pause the narrative's flow for a moment while the group collectively decides which menace to use and then fleshes it out.

Each potential antagonist in the following pages has a brief bit of background material and a few questions. Starting with the player with the Death authority, take turns choosing a question and consulting the oracles until all the questions about the menace have been answered. (If you have more questions than you have players, let the remaining players create their own questions about the antagonist, based upon the previously answered questions.)



Ms. Amelia Pantoufle sold her soul to a spirit in exchange for great wealth. That's gonna cause you some problems. You're going to have to find the current owner and reap it before she dies.

-The Inevitable Settling of Debts

# The Widow's Walk Shipping Company

**NED:** *I asked you not to use the word "zombie". It's disrespectful. Stumbling around squawking for brains? That's not how they do. And "undead"? Nobody wants to be "un"-anything. Why begin a statement with a negative? It's like saying, "I don't disagree." Just say you agree.*

**EMERSON:** *Are you comfortable with "living dead"?*

**NED:** *You're either living or you're dead. When you're living, you're alive. When you're dead, that's what you are. But when you're dead and then you're not, you're alive again. Can't we say "alive again"? Didn't that sound nice?*

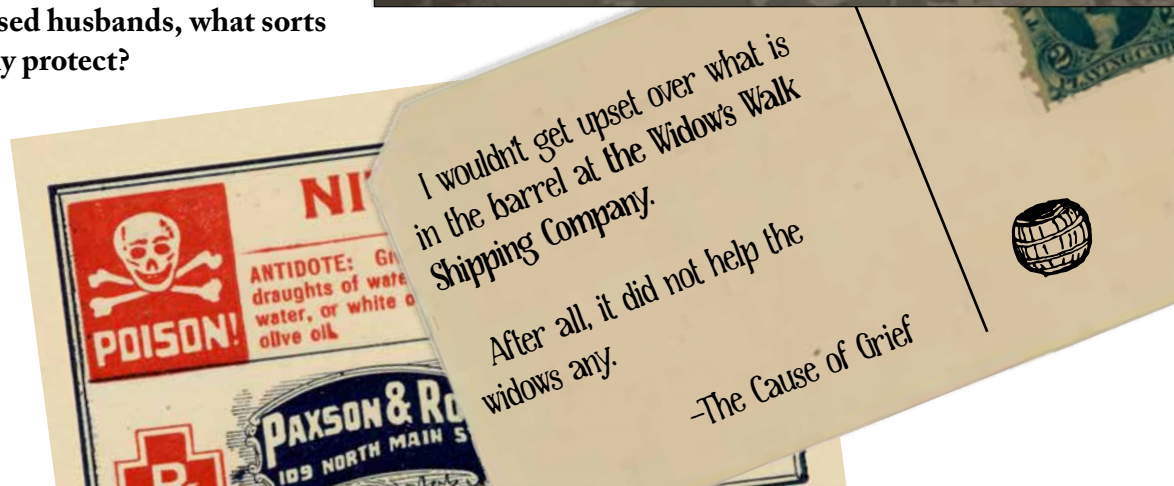
*-Pushing Daisies*

The Widow's Walk Shipping Company, a local import/export business, hides a secret cabal of undead beings. These reanimated beings are unwilling to move on to the next life but are also unable to show their faces in society. Some wish to maintain secrecy, while others advocate public rebellion against the living. The company is run by two identical twin sisters, **Mrs. Eudora Comiter**<sup>1</sup> and **Mrs. Iphigenia Belvedere**<sup>2</sup>, who are just trying to protect their deceased husbands.

- ☞ How do the widowed twin sisters hide their undead husbands and others from the eyes of the living?
- ☞ What illegal activities does the company perform to fund its secret undead hideout?
- ☞ How did the two founding undead escape death in the first place?
- ☞ What sorts of undead do they refuse to help and why do they reject these undead?
- ☞ Besides the founders' deceased husbands, what sorts of undead does the company protect?



<sup>1</sup> Electrocution  
<sup>2</sup> Mayhem





# The Tithonus Society

The Tithonus Society is an ancient secret society, like what conspiracy theorists imagine the Freemasons to be. They recruit the wealthy and powerful and thus the Tithonus Society has more wealth, supplies and political connections than you would believe. The Society uses these resources to pursue single-mindedly one goal: to achieve immortality.

Tithonus Society members are, typically, extremely old and frail but obscenely wealthy. They join in the (often vain) hope that the secret of immortality will be found before their death. Society members hope to continue existing well beyond the normal human lifespan, and thus to continue exerting control over society and shaping it in their own image.

The Society was founded long ago by a man named **Tithonus**<sup>1</sup>, who pursued the Grim Reaper and struck a bargain with Him. None but Tithonus and Death Himself know the details of their relationship, but in the end Tithonus was immortal. Unfortunately, tithonus did not bargain for eternal youth. Tithonus has continued to grow older and older over the centuries, until now he is a withered, crippled husk of a man, still barely able to lead the Society's machinations.

- ☞ **Where is the Tithonus Society's base of operations on the island?**
- ☞ **What odd superscience gadgets or black magic rituals have they discovered as part of their research into immortality?**
- ☞ **How did Tithonus get the Grim Reaper to never reap him?**
- ☞ **What financial or legal power can they exert over the Boxmullers or other residents of the island?**
- ☞ **Which NPC that we've already met is secretly working for the Tithonus Society?**

<sup>1</sup> No cause of death

"It is better to spend your time at funerals than at festivals. For you are going to die, and you should think about it while there is still time."

-Ecclesiastes 7:3



# Forest Spirits

"I said 'Hey man, do you think you can help?' He said 'Of course I can - I'm an elf. We're not just fictional device. We sail ravines and give advice.'"

-The Present Tense Turnover



Perdido Island is not only home to humans. Other things live in the woods. Though they typically avoid humans, the wilderness of Perdido Island is full of spirits of nature. Now that the Boxmullers have been given a taste of Death's abilities, they are more likely to notice other unnatural events that occur around them every day. And the forest spirits occasionally interfere with a natural, regular Reaping and make things complicated in unexpected ways.

- ✎ What strange forms do the forest spirits take?
- ✎ What mundane, everyday human concept do the forest spirits not understand?
- ✎ What makes the forest spirits so frightened of humans that they hide from them?
- ✎ What impossible and bizarre abilities and gifts do the forest spirits have?
- ✎ What sort of bargains or deals or games do the forest spirits involve humans in?

Miss Allison Jemery is trying to bargain her way out of her own impending demise. See that she meets her fate as per the proper schedule.  
-A Bit of a Slicker for Punctuality





# Warlocks And Necromancers

There are those that work to harness the supernatural to their own desires. These individuals tamper with the proper operation of the universe in order to benefit themselves. Some sell their soul to a more powerful entity, while others seek out forgotten and forbidden rituals. Regardless, they're all a bunch of nutjobs looking for whatever scraps of magickal power they can get their hands on.

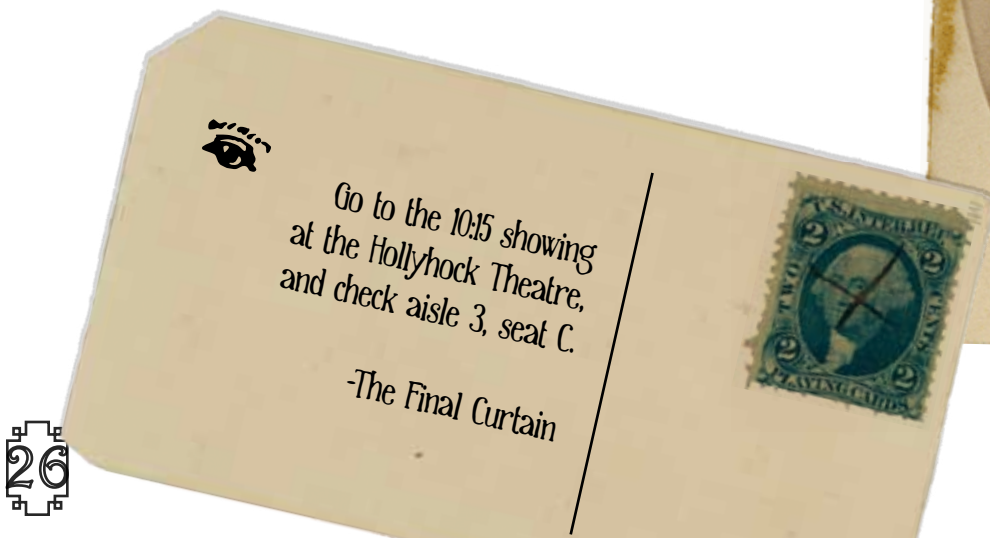
Your typical sorcerer is harmless, as long as you don't let them get their hands on anything of real power. Unfortunately, the Boxmuller family has been given the exact sort of power these whackos seek their entire lives. With a Reaper under their control, a necromancer could summon an army of unliving spirits or could break down the barriers between the mortal world and the afterlife. That would be like setting off a metaphysical thermonuclear weapon, unleashing countless multitudes of hungry ghosts ont our world.

*Bottom line:* necromancers are bad news for the Boxmuller family.

"Quaff while thou canst: another race,  
When thou and thine, like me, are sped,  
May rescue thee from Earth's embrace,  
And rhyme and revel with dead."

-Lines Inscribed upon a Cup  
Formed from a Skull",  
Lord Byron

- ☞ Who was this necromancer before they learned the dark arts?
- ☞ What malevolent entity grants them magickal power?
- ☞ How do they misuse and abuse their power over life and death?
- ☞ What power do they have over the dead and the undead and what power over the dead do they lack?
- ☞ What taboos do they have to follow to keep their power?





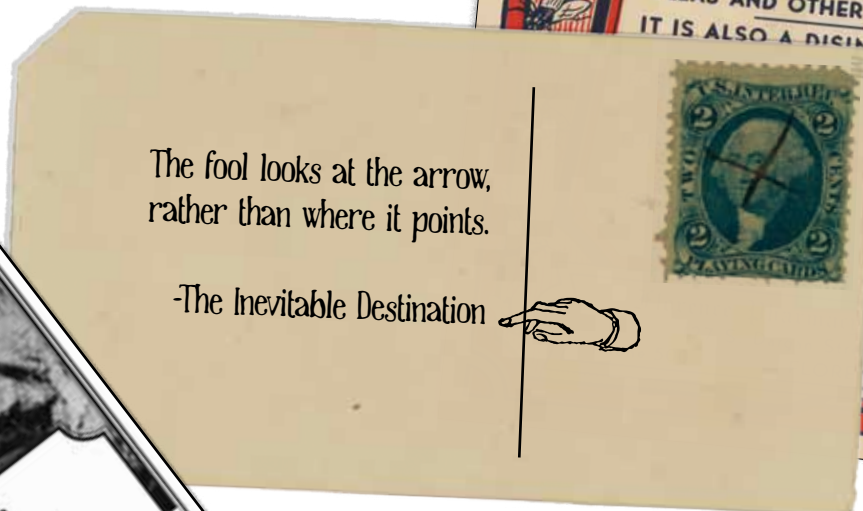
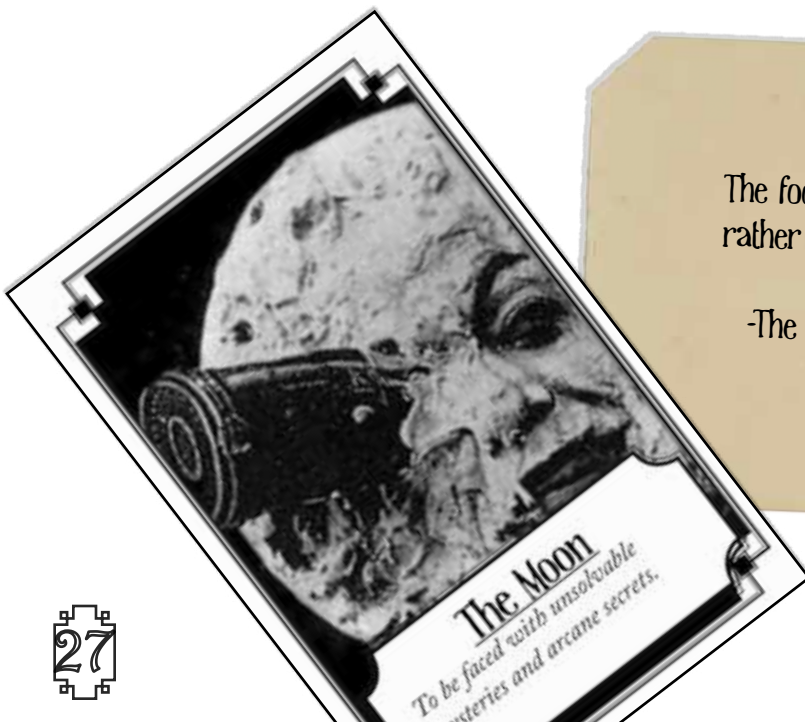
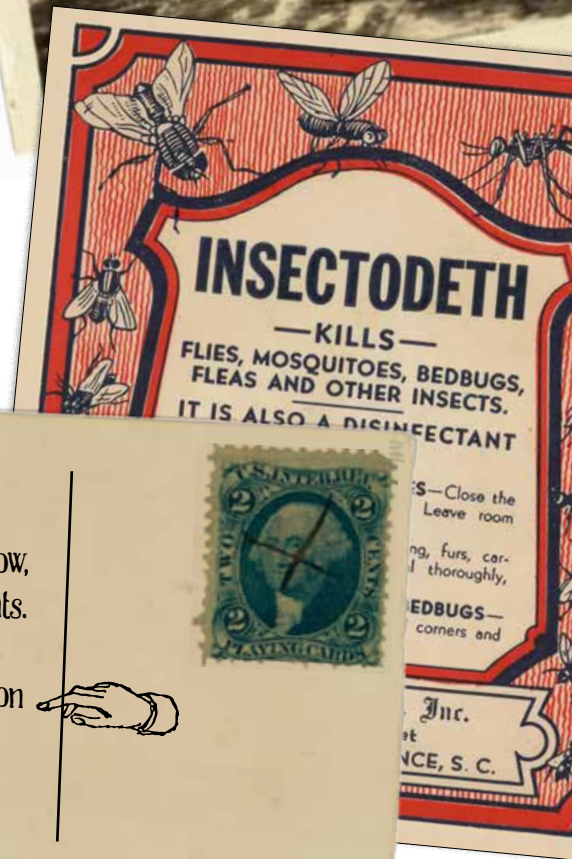
# Isabel Stanros

**Isabel Stanros<sup>1</sup>** is just an ordinary woman, doing her job as coroner and hoping that justice is served on Perdido Island. She is intelligent and curious. Possibly too curious for her own good. So it is only a matter of time before she begins to wonder about the family of strangers that recently came to the island and began to appear at the scene of every single death. What will the Boxmullers tell her then?

- ✎ What sort of unexpected knowledge or ability does Ms. Stanros bring to her job as coroner?
- ✎ Why can't she trust the police? Why does she have to investigate the Boxmullers herself?
- ✎ How and why does she interact regularly with the Boxmullers outside of her job?
- ✎ What mystery brought her to Perdido Island in the first place, that the Boxmullers could help solve?
- ✎ What trouble has her excessive curiosity gotten her into before?

---

1 Nephrosis

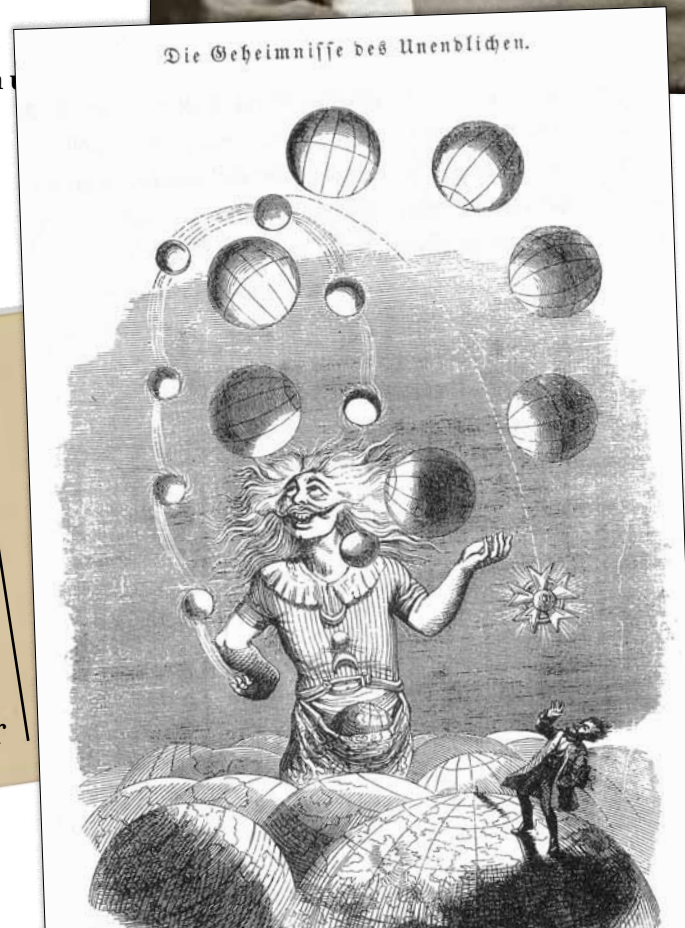
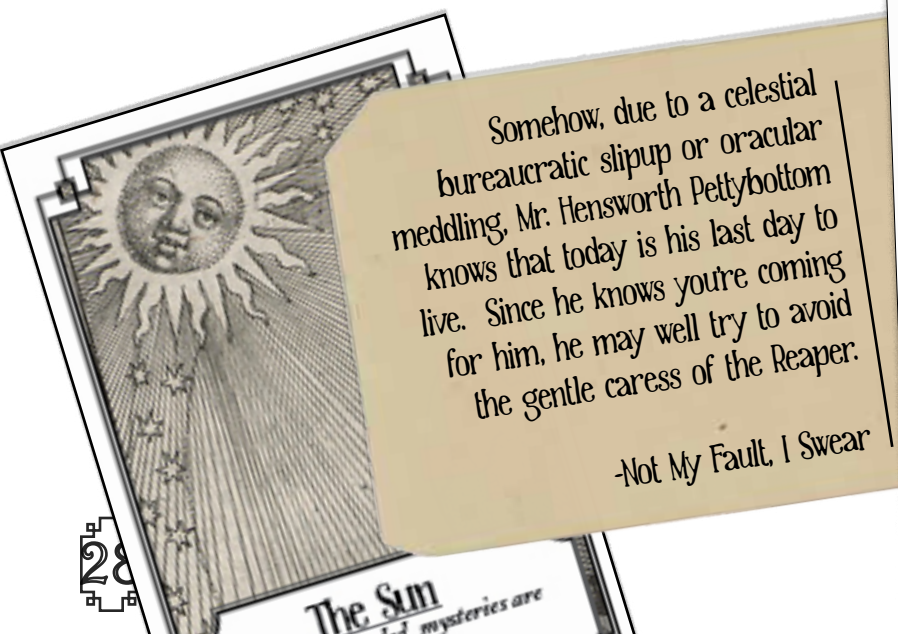


# Upper Management

Death isn't the highest member of the Celestial Bureaucracy. In fact, the Grim Reaper is relatively low down the pecking order. And so while he's away, the Auditors from Upstairs are going to have to keep an eye on our substitute Reapers. Upper Management has sent a representative to keep an eye on you. Make sure you're up to quota, Reaping the proper souls and not interfering with Destiny too much. That sort of thing. And Management isn't very happy to be working with amateurs.

"Dead? No excuse for laying off work."  
-Time Bandits

- ✎ What earthly form does the representative from Management take?
- ✎ What inexplicable rules does Upper Management expect us to follow?
- ✎ What has Management threatened us with if we do not comply?
- ✎ What does Management want us to do that goes beyond our moral limits?
- ✎ What terrible mix up has occurred higher up the celestial food chain that we we now have to clean





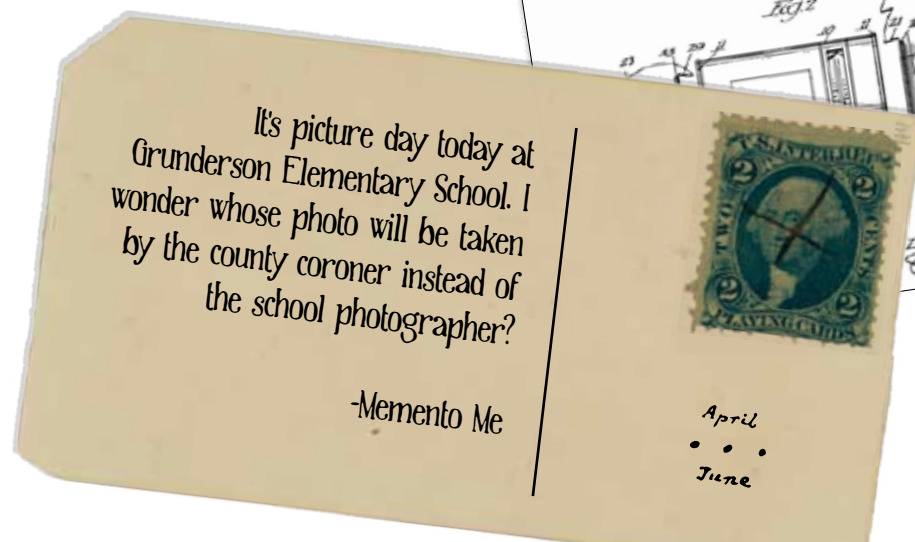
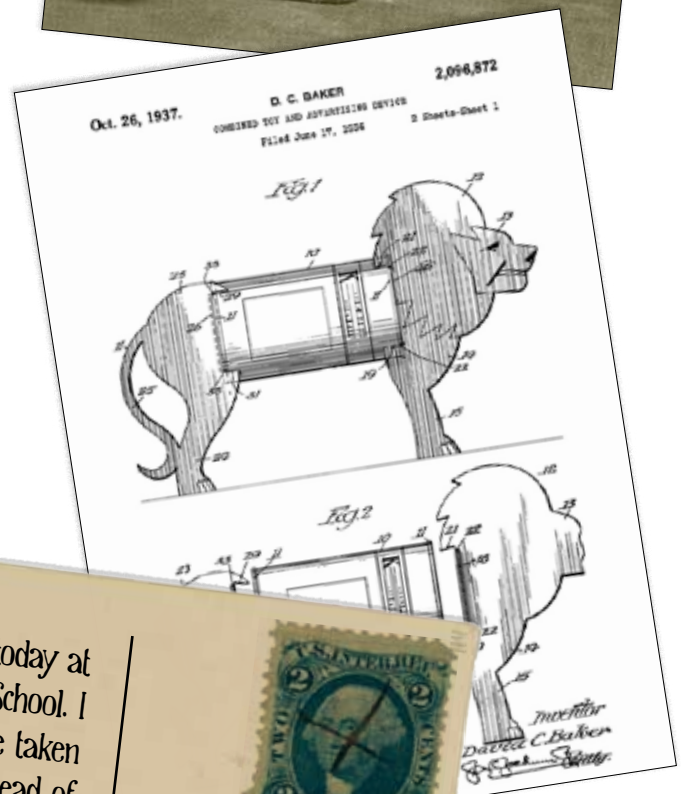
# Baxter von Borgstrom

Baxter Ermintrude Dagobert von Borgstrom<sup>1</sup> is an overly observant nine year old child. Unlike adults and most children, Baxter can see what is actually happening. He is aware of the unnatural events going on around him at all times. Others are fooled by magical glamors or spells of disguise, but Baxter is not.

Baxter's wealthy yet distracted parents always tell him to stop inventing stories about the fairies that live in the forests, or the zombies that live by the docks. But now young Baxter has discovered an even weirder matter: the Boxmullers. He sees that they are spirits of the dead, and always accompanied by the ghosts of the recently deceased. And he has decided to expose them... somehow. He's not really sure just how, exactly, but Baxter aims to show that the Boxmuller family is hiding something big.

- ☞ How does Baxter regularly get away from adult supervision to investigate the unnatural on his own?
- ☞ What supernatural actions has Baxter secretly watched the Primary Characters perform?
- ☞ What resources does Baxter possess that are unusual for a nine year old?
- ☞ Young Baxter is also surprisingly knowledgeable about what other aspect of Perdido Island?
- ☞ Baxter mistakenly thinks the Boxmuller are what sort of supernatural entity?

1 Senescence





# "The Deputy"

**Deputy Antigone P. Cooke**<sup>1</sup> is not what she appears. As far as the population of Perdido Island is concerned, Deputy Cooke is the somewhat dull sidekick to the beloved (if bumbling) **Sheriff Horatio Flack**<sup>2</sup>. Citizens rarely give the Deputy a second thought. If you need something done, you go to the sheriff. You only concern yourself with the Deputy when some emergency is happening, and even then only to find out what is happening and how to stay safe.

That's just how the Deputy wants it. She's spent a long, long time on Perdido Island and she wants to keep on staying out of the public eye as long as possible. Deputy Cooke, you see, is an ancient god disguised as a human being. "Antigone" has chosen to remain on this island in hiding, where other metaphysical beings can't find her. She took on the job of sheriff's deputy in order to ensure that she was always on hand when important things were happening. You know, when people were dying or when supernatural creatures were threatening her hiding spot. Supernatural creatures like the PCs.

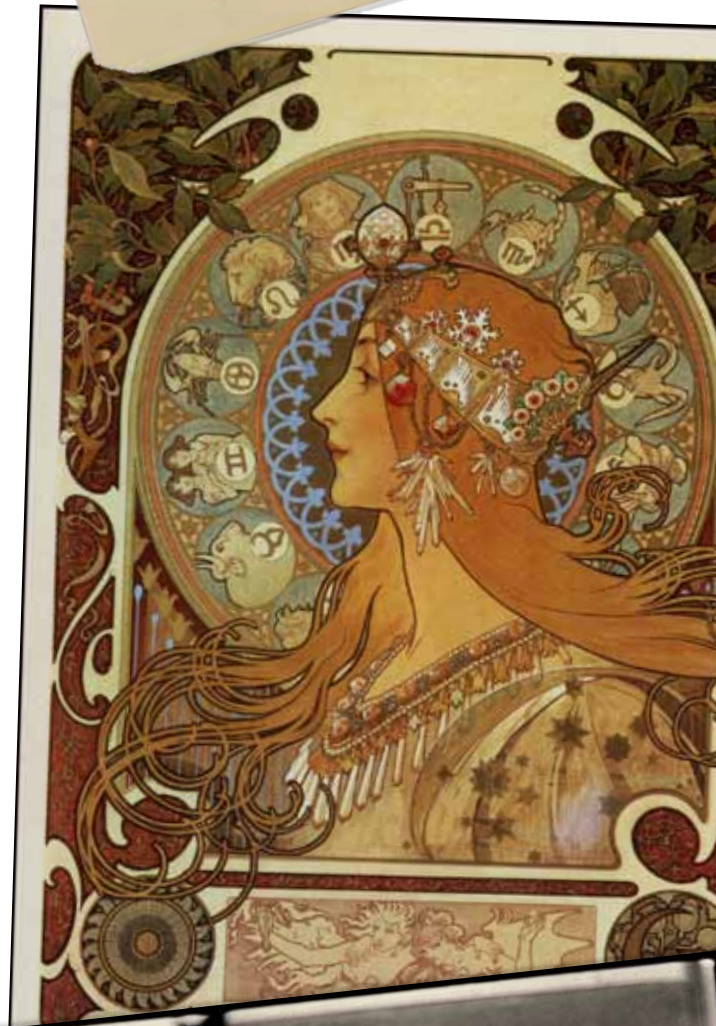
- ☞ Why is she hiding out on this tiny island?
- ☞ What was she the god of?
- ☞ Why does she have a centuries old grudge against the Grim Reaper?
- ☞ What does she demand that we Reapers stay away from at all cost? Why do we have to meddle with it?
- ☞ What power can she manifest to punish us if we anger her?

---

1 No Cause of Death (??)

2 Misfire

They say that fire is the  
devils only friend.  
-Dirges in the Dark



# Constantina Vincentez

**Constantina** is well known across Perdido Island and surrounding lands as a spiritual medium. She is, of course, a complete fraud. Her performances are all faked using a variety of cheap special effects, cold reading and spies in the audience. Constantina has no qualms about separating the gullible from their money. She sees her fake psychic gig as an easy way to get fame and fortune. But recently, her popularity has been falling. Everyone on the island has already seen her act. She need something new, something exciting and interesting and—most importantly—something inexplicable.

If Constantina Vincentez discovers that the Boxmullers know how a person will die, she will try to exploit this ability. The same is true of other unnatural abilities she might discover. First, she'll try to bribe the PCs into working for her. If that doesn't work, she'll try to trick the PCs into revealing secret information. Or she may try to expose the PCs as frauds... or put them before a skeptic society as evidence of the supernatural.

- ✎ **What mysterious metaphysical origin does Constantina claim as the origin of her supernatural abilities?**
- ✎ **What prominent local skeptic is always a thorn in Constantina's side?**
- ✎ **What psychic abilities does Constantina claim to possess?**
- ✎ **What prominent local is a true believer of Constantina's?**
- ✎ **Who assists Constantina in her underhanded schemes?**



"Fear death by water"  
the fortune teller says.

-The Phoenician Sailor





# Create Your Own

If none of our carefully constructed antagonists appeal to your group of chroniclers, perhaps you would prefer to custom manufacture your own bespoke nemesis? To do so, simply take turns consulting the oracles concerning one of these questions until each question has been asked at least once.

- ☞ Who or what is this new threat?
- ☞ What does this antagonist want? Why can't the antagonist have it?
- ☞ How do he/she/it intend to endanger, inconvenience or harm the primary characters?
- ☞ What unexpected capabilities does this threat possess?
- ☞ What exaggerated quirk or flaw does this antagonist display?
- ☞ How does the antagonist morally justify, even if no one else believes those justifications?



# Inspiration

## Novels

Discworld novels by Terry Pratchett, particularly those that focus on Death himself (*Mort*, *Reaper Man*, *Soul Music*, *Hogfather*, etc.)

## Short Stories

*Machine of Death*, edited by Ryan North, Matthew Bennardo and David Malki

## Television

*Dead Like Me* and *Pushing Daisies* created by Bryan Fuller.  
*The Adventures of Pete and Pete* created by Will McRobb and Chris Viscardi

## Gilliam

*Time Bandits*, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, and *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* dir. Terry Gilliam

## Videogames

*Grim Fandango* by LucasArts, The *Professor Layton* games by Level 5 Games

## Movies

*Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* dir. Jean-Peuret Jeunet,  
*Spirited Away* dir. Hayao Miyazaki, *Beetlejuice* dir. Tim Burton

## Games

*A Penny For My Thoughts* by Paul Tevis  
*Archipelago II* by Matthis Majcher  
*Do: Pilgrims of the Flying Temple* by Daniel Solis  
*Fiasco* by Jason Morningstar  
*Ganakagok* by Bill White  
*Nobilis* by Jenna Moran

Author Darnell P Longbellow  
came to the island seeking  
inspiration. Instead, he'll find  
something more unexpected.

-The Midnight Disease



Original game concept by Sam Zeitlin.  
Many thanks to him for letting me use it.



This is an open source game.

So please, play it and modify it and make it your own. And share it on the internet and let me know if you do any of those nifty things with it. Contact me at [nickwedig@yahoo.com](mailto:nickwedig@yahoo.com) or visit my website at <http://nickwedig.libraryofhighmoon.com/> to see what other cool, open source games I've made. While you're there, you can download the PDF of Tarot cards made to go with this game.

*Death Takes a Holiday Version 0.2* by Nick Wedig is licensed under the **Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License**. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/> or send a letter to: Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.



The sounds of the prophets are  
written on the subway walls.

-The Sound of Silence

You can't take it with you.  
But one greedy banker  
is definitely going to try.



-The Final Tally

